Quick Start Guide

Version 2.1

Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program
Project Consultation and Review Website
Version SGv2.0 (https://sagegrouse.mt.gov/ **)**
January 9, 2020

Quick Start Guide Purpose

- Introduce Version 2.0 of the project review website
- Provide overview of the project submission process and all its steps
- Provide clear guidance for submitting projects to proponents
- Establish clear expectations for what proponents can expect from the Program and when
- Provide help / tips for getting through the submission process
- Glossary

Quick Start Guide Audience

- Proponents – possessing a wide range of computer skills and experience with the process
- General public – for general interest in how the website and review process works

Table of Contents

1.0 Instructions

1.1 Introduction and Overview of the Process

The greater sage grouse was once a candidate for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act across its range in 11 western states. Montana and 10 other western states developed conservation strategies to conserve sage grouse and address threats caused by habitat fragmentation, development, and loss of sagebrush. These state commitments led the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to decide listing was not warranted.

Montana's Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy is based on the collaborative work of the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Advisory Council and supported by diverse stakeholders. The 2015 Legislature passed the Greater Sage Grouse Stewardship Act and Governor Bullock signed Executive Orders 12-2015 and 21-2015.

The Executive Orders apply to all programs and activities of state government, including permitting, grant programs, and technical assistance. Through a consultation process, the Program will work with project proponents to first avoid impacts, minimize impacts, and restore impacted areas. Compensatory mitigation may be required for impacts that can't be avoided, minimized or restored.

The Orders require the Program to review all proposed activities in sage grouse habitats designated as a core area, general habitat, or a connectivity area. If the proposed activity will take place outside of these designated areas, or in exempted areas such as incorporated cities and towns, Program review is not required.

The consultation process should be completed prior to submitting an application to the permitting agency. State agency permitting programs will return incomplete applications which lack documentation if a consultation is required.

The following definitions are important for understanding key concepts used in the Program review:

Surface Disturbance – includes any conversion of formerly suitable habitat to grasslands, croplands, mining, well pads, roads, or other physical disturbances that renders the habitat unusable for sage grouse caused by proposed activities submitted to the Program for review.

Reclamation **-** Reclamation should re-establish native grasses, forbs, and shrubs during interim and final reclamation. The goal of reclamation is to achieve cover, species composition, and life form diversity commensurate with the surrounding plant community or desired ecological condition to benefit sage grouse and replace or enhance sage grouse habitat to the degree that environmental conditions allow. Landowners should be consulted on the desired plant mix on private lands. The operator is required to control noxious and invasive plant species, including cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) and Japanese brome (*Bromus japonicus*).

Unsuitable Habitat – is land within the historic range of sage grouse that did not, does not, nor will not provide sage grouse habitat due to natural ecological conditions such as badlands or canyons.

Visit https://sagegrouse.mt.gov for general information about the Program and to read the Executive Orders.

1.2 Am I In or Out? Determining if Consultation is Necessary

When you visit the Program website home page, you will see links at the top of the page that will take you to information pages on the Program components, including the Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team (MSGOT), Stewardship Grants, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), and a map of designated sage grouse habitat. These pages can also be accessed by using the Program component folders located at the bottom of the home page.

To determine whether your project would occur in sage grouse habitats designated as a core area, general habitat, or a connectivity area, review the Sage Grouse Core Areas and General Habitat Map on the home page of the Program website. The map allows you to zoom in on your area of interest using the "+" or "-" buttons on the upper left side of the map. Use the mouse cursor and hover over each button to see a pop-up window with a description of its function. You can search for your proposed project area by using the "Location" feature button located below the zoom buttons. This feature allows for searching by area name, such as "Glasgow, MT", or by using the Public Land Survey System (PLSS) to locate Township, Range, and Sections. The PLSS format is "2S 4W", for example. To search by latitude and longitude, the format is: Longitude first, then latitude (-109.3773; 46.8174).

You can select different base maps for easy location identification using the map layer button in the upper right corner of the map on the menu bar. The base maps are Aerial, Street, and Terrain views. Using the same button, you can turn on and off different map layers. The choices are: Sage Grouse Executive Order (EO) Habitat Classification; BLM Priority Areas; Counties; Management Zones; Exempt Community Boundaries; Lek N0No Surface Occupancy Areas) NSOAs; TRS (PLSS); and Existing Disturbances.

If you determine that your project is outside of the EO area, you are encouraged to take a screenshot of the map location for documentation to submit to the state permitting agencies if required. Permitting agencies are closely monitoring project locations and will be checking each project for compliance with the EO.

1.3 Create a secure ePass Account on the Montana.gov website

If your project is within sage grouse habitat, or if you're not sure, then you will need to create a Montana.gov ePass account to begin the consultation process. The ePass Montana site provides a convenient and secure service on Montana's official state website, https://app.mt.gov/epass/Authn/selectIDP.html, that provides the following benefits to Montana's businesses and citizens:

- Allows access to all authorized Government services with one username and password
- Provides customization options for http://mt.gov so customers can personalize their services page
- Shows customers other government services that may be useful to them
- In the future, will grant them access into authorized federal government services

Creating an ePass account is easy and will allow you to manage your project information in a secure environment using one Username and Password. Save this information so that you have it handy when you return to the website, as you'll need it to log in each time. If you forget your Username or Password, you can ask the site to send you this information to the email you identified when you created your account. All of the information in your ePass account is stored on a secure server behind an agency internet firewall and can only be accessed by you or Program staff. You cannot see projects submitted by other proponents, and they cannot see yours.

To begin this registration process, click the Login button on the menu bar in the upper right corner of the home page (https://app.mt.gov/epass/Authn/selectIDP.html). Make sure you have zoomed back out to the full map view so that the Login button is visible. There is also a hot link in the instructional text at the top of the map.

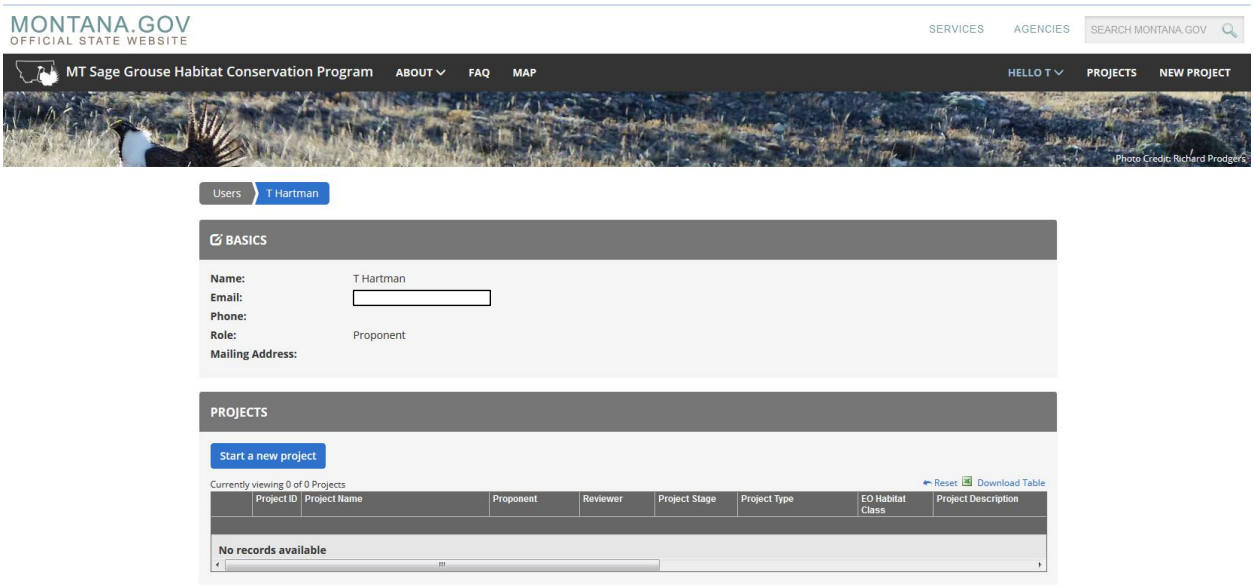
Basics

Once you have created a secure ePass account and have logged in, you will see your "Dashboard" that displays several ways for you to manage your account. You can review past projects that you have submitted to the program, search your past projects by Disturbance Type, continue work on an incomplete project submission that you saved previously, or submit a new project. You can access and use the Program website on a desktop, laptop, or tablet. No special software is needed. The workflow chart on the following page illustrates the components of the review process and their relationship to each other. If you have a problem with entering information or saving data on the site, try using a different browser such as Chrome or Firefox.

2.1 Submitting a Proposed Project to the Program

USER PAGE

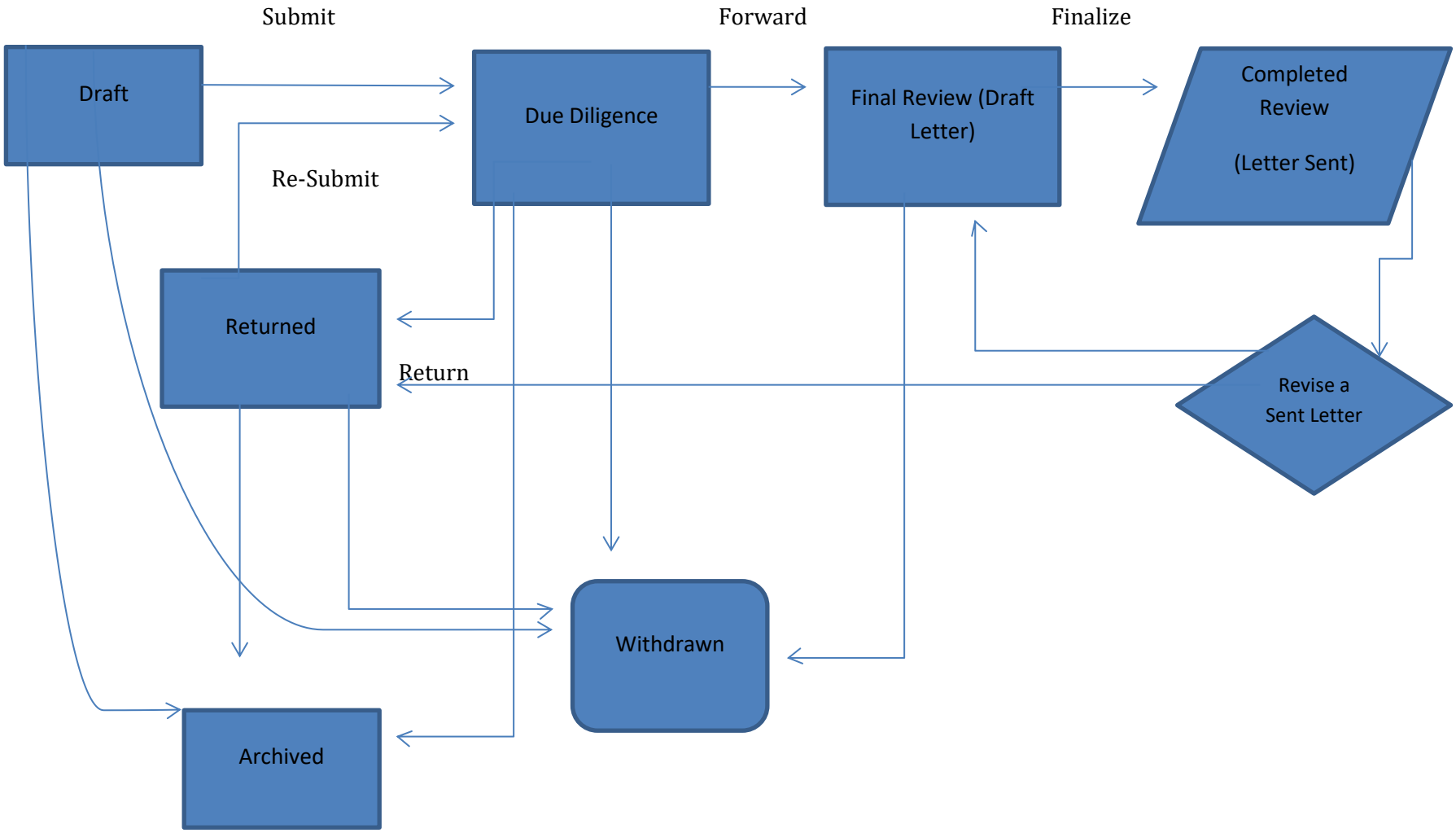
This page will enable you to look at your contact information, see your history of submitted projects, or start a new project. You can also get to this page by clicking the NEW PROJECTS button on the menu bar at the top of the page.



NEW PROJECT

Click on the "NEW PROJECT" button in the upper right corner of the menu bar and it will take you to the Instructions page. The New Project web page is for anyone proposing new activities that require a permit or who seek state funding or technical assistance for non-regulated activities in designated sage grouse habitats. State agencies undertaking state actions in designated sage grouse habitat will also use this page.

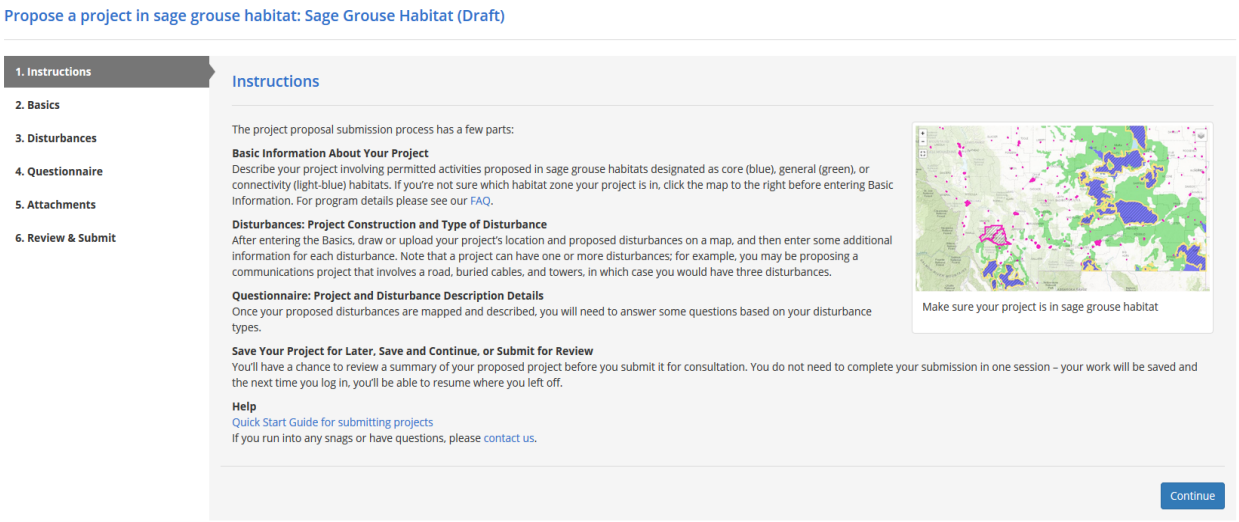
The Project web page creates an orderly, consistent way for the Program to receive and process requests for consultation. Providing complete information will help the Program review projects more efficiently and shorten review times. Your information will be kept



SGv2.0 WorkFlowChart 4/10/17

secure, is not viewable by others, and will not be sold or disseminated. If you do not complete the new project submission, just click the Save button, and you can return at a later time to complete the Questionnaire and Submit your project for review. All information, including attachments, will be saved for you.

1. **Instructions:**
   You will now see the Instructions page, which will help guide you through the submission process. You can return to this page for guidance at any time by clicking on the "1. Instructions" button on the left side of the page.



2. **Basics: Information about Your Project**
   This wizard lets you submit project information for any permitted activities proposed in sage grouse habitats designated as core (blue), general (green), or connectivity (light-blue) habitats. If you're not sure which habitat zone(s) your project is in, this wizard will help you determine that. There is a link located under the Project Type dropdown menu that allows you to download an Excel table of all Project Types and their related Disturbance Types for reference. For program details please see our https://sagegrouse.mt.gov/FAQ

3. **Disturbances: Project Construction and Type of Disturbance**
   After entering the Basics, you need to draw or upload your project's location and proposed disturbances on a map, and then enter some additional information for each disturbance. Note that a project can have one or more disturbances; for example, you may be proposing a communications project that involves a road, buried cables, and towers, in which case you would have three disturbances.

4. **Questionnaire: Project and Disturbance Description Details**
   Once your proposed disturbances are mapped and described, you will need to answer some questions based on your disturbance types.

5. **Attachments:**
   Add supporting documents, photos, or permit applications here to be kept with your project record.

6. **Review and Submit: Save and Return Later, or Review and Submit Your Project**
   You will have a chance to review a summary of your proposed project before you submit it for consultation. You do not need to complete this wizard in one session – your work will be saved and the next time you log in, you'll be able to resume where you left off.

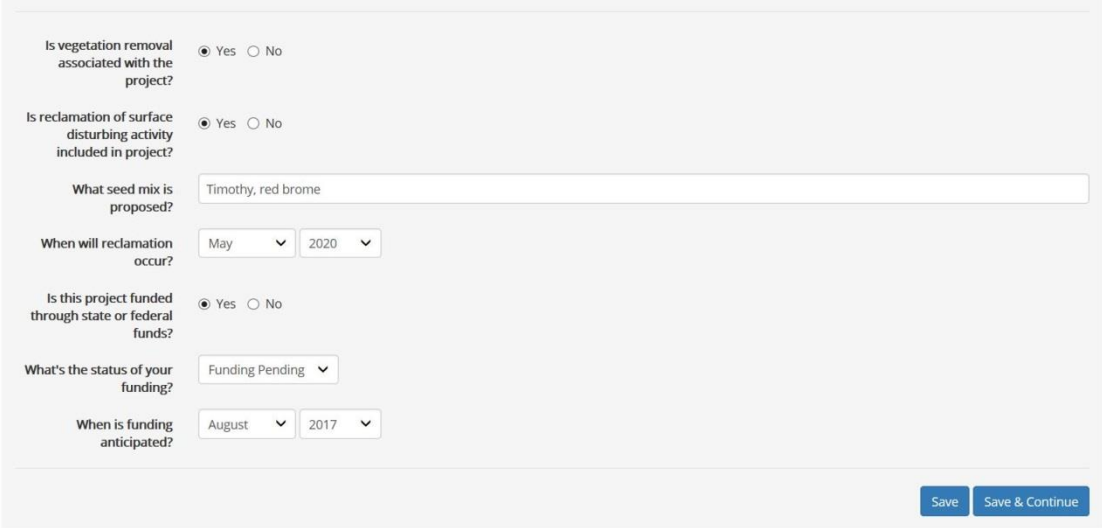
Help
If you run into any problems or have questions, please contact the Program at 406-444-1467 or 406-444-2613 or email us at sagegrouse@mt.gov .

2.2 Entering Basics Page Information

The Basics page begins the process of describing and documenting your proposed project. It is important to be as thorough as possible in your answers to avoid the need for submitting additional information at a later date, which will slow down the review process.

On this page you will be able to: give your project a Name; assign it a Project Type; write a project Description; provide additional contact information such as an agency representative assisting you with the project; Permit Agencies; and information regarding the surface disturbance, reclamation, and funding status of the project. There is also a link located under the Project Type dropdown menu that allows you to view and download an Excel table of all Project Types and their related Disturbance Types for reference.

To enter the Project Type, click on the down arrow and you will see a list of six categories, each with specific subcategories. By selecting the most accurate description for your project, the website will narrow down the follow-up questions about Disturbances, reducing your submission time and effort. The following screenshot shows some basic questions that would apply to all surface disturbing projects.

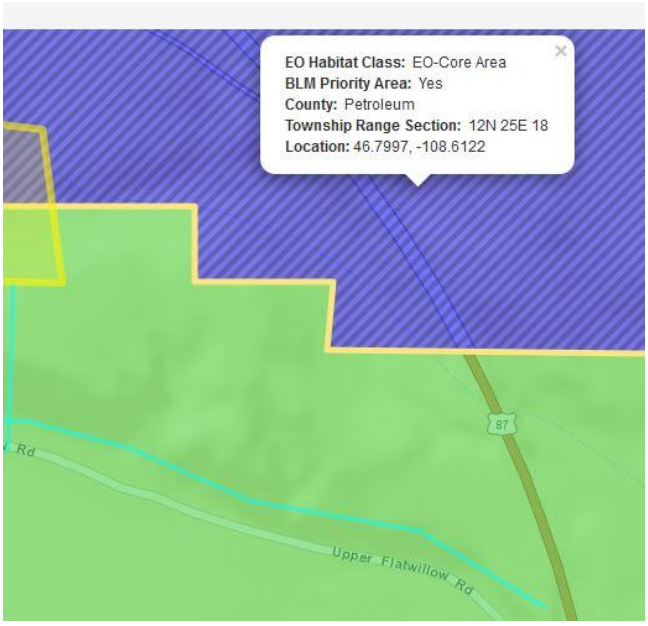


Once you have completed the page, click Save to archive all entered information and return at a later time to complete, or Save and Continue to proceed to the Disturbances page. Once this information is saved in the Draft stage, the next available Project ID number will be assigned to the project.

3.0 Disturbances

This page is where you enter spatial data (the project footprint) for your project. The Program then uses this information to analyze the location and size of the project, and the types of disturbances being proposed. There is also a link located under the Project Type dropdown menu that allows you to view and download an Excel table of all Project Types and their related Disturbance Types for reference.

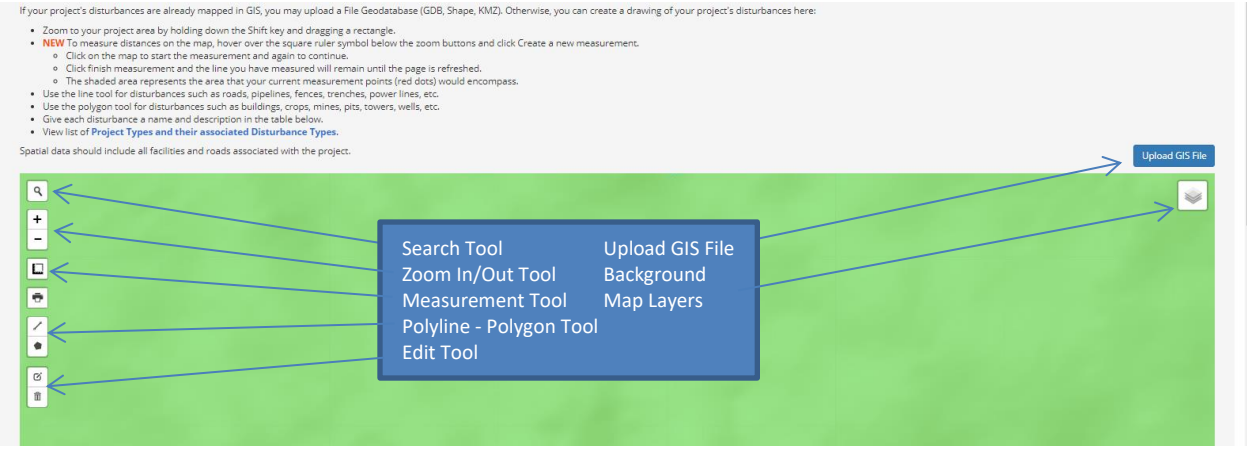
The first step is to locate your project using the search tools in the upper left corner of the map. You can search by street address, by Township, Range, and Section (PLSS), by town name, etc. Note that the cursor can be used to display information for a given point on the map by clicking your mouse. This location is not for a given feature but is based on where the cursor is located on the coordinate plane. You will get a pop-up that looks similar to this:



The next step is to enter spatial data, and there are two ways to do this. This spatial data can be either drawn on the map provided or submitted by uploading computer-created Geographical Information System (GIS) shapefiles or geodatabase files. These files need to be compressed, or zipped, before uploading. For smaller projects you can use the Polyline or Polygon tools in the upper left corner of the map. Use the line tool for disturbances such as roads, pipelines, fences, trenches, power lines, etc. Use the polygon tool for disturbances such as buildings, crops, mines, pits, towers, wells, etc. For larger projects, or if you're comfortable with creating GIS files, upload those files. The GIS files will be displayed on the

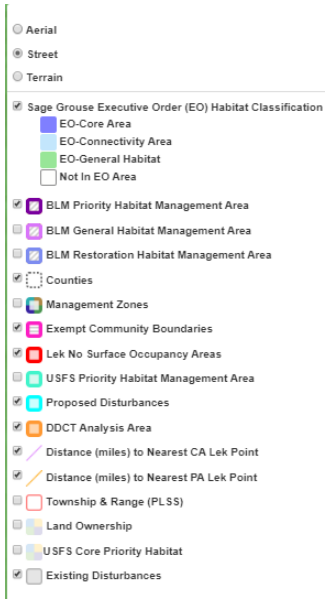
map seen on this page as soon as they are uploaded. Use the Zoom In/Out Tool or the Search Tool to correctly locate your project. See the figure below for location of these tools.

It is very important to be as accurate as possible, both with location and with the size of the project footprint. Don't make the size of the disturbance footprint any larger than it will actually be, as this will indicate a greater amount of disturbance and therefore a greater negative impact to sage grouse habitat.



There are several options for Background Map Layers to help you locate your project. Hold your cursor over the layers button, and a menu will open that allows you to select which layers you'd like to have displayed. The first three selections, Aerial, Street, and Terrain will change what the map background displays.

The following eight check boxes turn on or off specific map layers that display information specifically for sage grouse habitat and management considerations. In some cases, viewing topographical details might be easier if habitat layers are switched off. We encourage you to experiment to find the combination of layers that best suits your purposes.



For each Project Type selected, there will be a specific list of Disturbance Types created, based on the features of the Project. For Program consultation, there can only be one type of project, but that project could have several kinds of disturbances, each with a different level of habitat impact, life of the project, etc. For example, a gravel pit (Project Type: Mining) could have several Disturbance Types with different impacts (Disturbance Type: Pit, Access Road, Transmission Line, Water Well, Railroad). The pit may last for 20 years and then be reclaimed, while the road and transmission line may be permanent. The Program has defined Permanent as any disturbance lasting longer than 25 years.

3.1 Project Types and Their Associated Disturbance Types

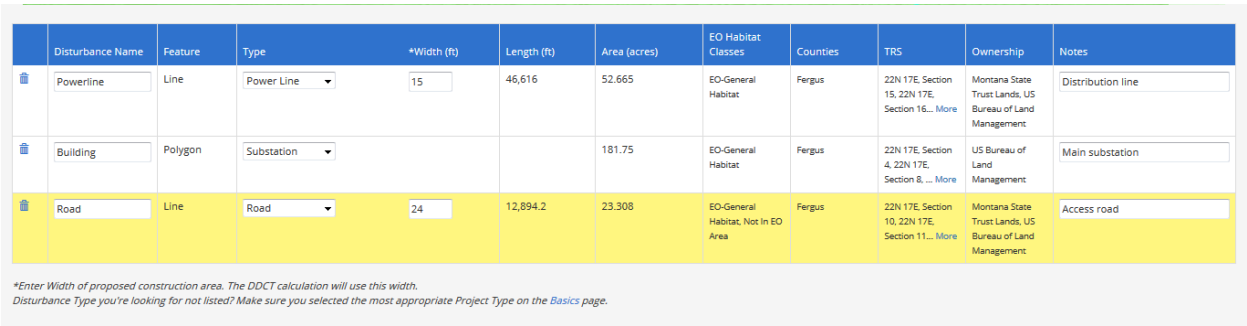
The following table lists all options for Project Type, and its associated Disturbance Types.

Project Type	Associated Disturbance Types
Agriculture - Land	Building, Crop, Fence, Grazing, Livestock Area, Other, Power Line, Road, Unknown Line, Unknown Polygon
Agriculture - Water	Building, Irrigation, Other, Pipeline, Power Line, Stock Pond, Stock Tank, Water Diversion, Water Well, Unknown Line, Unknown Polygon
Energy - Geothermal	Building, Fence, Gathering Substation, Other, Pipeline, Power Line, Power Plant, Road, Storage Yard, Trench, Well, Unknown Line, Unknown Polygon
Energy - Hydroelectric	Building, Fence, Maintenance Activities, Other, Pipeline, Pond, Power Line, Power Plant, Road, Spillway, Storage Yard, Substation, Trench, Unknown Line, Unknown Polygon
Energy - Nuclear	Building, Fence, Other, Pipeline, Pond, Power Line, Power Plant, Road, Storage Yard, Substation, Trench, Unknown Line, Unknown Polygon
Energy - Oil Shale	Building, Fence, Open Pit, Other, Pipeline, Pond, Power Line, Processing Facility, Railroad, Road, Well Pad, Unknown Line, Unknown Polygon
Energy - Oil/Gas	Building, Central Battery System, Collection Facility, Compressor, Fence, Gas/Oil Well, Maintenance Activities, Other, Pipeline, Plug and Abandon, Pond, Power Line, Power Plant, Railroad, Road, Storage Yard, Temporary Abandonment, Well Pad, Unknown Line, Unknown Polygon
Energy - Solar	Building, Fence, Field, Other, Pipeline, Power Line, Power Plant, Road, Substation, Unknown Line, Unknown Polygon
Energy - Tar Sands	Building, Fence, Gravel Pit, Other, Pipeline, Pond, Power Line, Processing Facility, Railroad, Road, Storage Tank, Unknown Line, Unknown Polygon
Energy - Wind	Building, Fence, Other, Pipeline, Power Line, Power Plant, Road, Storage Yard, Substation, Trench, Wind Turbine, Unknown Line, Unknown Polygon
Forestry	Other, Timber Harvest, Unknown Line, Unknown Polygon
Habitat Treatment	Fire, Mechanical, Other, Restoration, Unknown Line, Unknown Polygon
Infrastructure - Communication	Building, Cable, Fence, Other, Power Line, Road, Storage Yard, Tower, Unknown Line, Unknown Polygon
Infrastructure - Industrial/Commercial	Building, Gravel Pit, Other, Parking Area, Pipeline, Pond, Power Line, Road, Storage Yard, Unknown Line, Unknown Polygon
Infrastructure - Military	Base, Building, Other, Parking Area, Pipeline, Power Line, Range, Road, Storage Yard, Unknown Line, Unknown Polygon
Infrastructure - Pipeline (Major)	Building, Compressor, Fence, Other, Pigging Facility / Launcher, Pipeline, Pond, Power Line, Road, Storage Yard, Trench, Unknown Line, Unknown Polygon
Infrastructure - Recreation	Building, Motorized/OHV Road, Motorized/OHV Trail, Other, Parking Area, Pipeline, Power Line, Unknown Line, Unknown Polygon
Infrastructure - Residential	Building, Other, Park, Parking Area, Pipeline, Pond, Power Line, Road, Septic System, Subdivision Area, Water Storage, Water Well, Unknown Line, Unknown Polygon
Infrastructure - Transmission Line	Fence, Other, Power Line, Road, Storage Yard, Substation, Tower, Unknown Line, Unknown Polygon

Infrastructure - Transportation	Airport Radio Tower, Airport Runway, Borrow Pit, Bridge, Building, Culvert, Interstate Highway, Other, Parking Area, Pipeline, Railroad Mainline, Railroad Spur, Road, Storage Yard, Unknown Line, Unknown Polygon
Mining	Building, Core Hole, Fence, Gravel Pit, Mine, Monitoring Well, Other, Pipeline, Pond, Power Line, Power Plant, Railroad, Road, Shaft, Storage Yard, Stormwater Discharge Outlet Pipe, Trench, Waste Rock / Tailings / Overburden, Water Well, Unknown Line, Unknown Polygon

The accuracy of the information entered on this page for each Disturbance Type is very important for correctly assessing the project's potential impact to sage grouse habitat. If the project footprint is larger than the project will be, the review will determine there is a higher level of surface disturbance to sage grouse habitat. If you change your mind about information you've already entered, you can edit it by returning to the appropriate page or returning to the Projects page and selecting the Edit button in the left column. The revised information will then be saved when you click the Save or Save and Continue buttons. To delete or revise a Disturbance Type, select the feature on the map and this will highlight the correct disturbance row. Then use the trach can button in the left column to delete that feature. You can then redraw or upload your GIS files to start over with that disturbance.

The following screenshot shows how the Disturbance Type information is displayed.



	Disturbance Name	Feature	Type	*Width (ft)	Length (ft)	Area (acres)	EO Habitat Classes	Counties	TRS	Ownership	Notes
🗑	Powerline	Line	Power Line	15	46,616	52.665	EO-General Habitat	Fergus	22N 17E, Section 15, 22N 17E, Section 16... More	Montana State Trust Lands, US Bureau of Land Management	Distribution line
🗑	Building	Polygon	Substation			181.75	EO-General Habitat	Fergus	22N 17E, Section 4, 22N 17E, Section 8, ... More	US Bureau of Land Management	Main substation
🗑	Road	Line	Road	24	12,894.2	23.308	EO-General Habitat, Not In EO Area	Fergus	22N 17E, Section 10, 22N 17E, Section 11... More	Montana State Trust Lands, US Bureau of Land Management	Access road

*Enter Width of proposed construction area. The DDCT calculation will use this width.
Disturbance Type you're looking for not listed? Make sure you selected the most appropriate Project Type on the Basics page.

3.2 Density Disturbance Calculation Tool Analysis

If your project occurs in Core habitat as defined in EO 12-2015 and 21-2015, or within BLM or USFS Priority Areas, then a Disturbance Density Calculation Tool (DDCT) analysis will be required to determine the amount of disturbance within your analysis area. The new website allows proponents to see NSOAs when they are zoomed in on the proposed project area. As stipulated in the EO, there will be no surface occupancy for new activities within 0.6 miles of the perimeter of active sage grouse leks. This means no surface facilities including roads shall be placed within the NSOA area. Other activities may be authorized with the application of appropriate seasonal stipulations, provided the resources protected by the NSOA are not adversely affected.

For example, and absent such adverse effects, underground utilities and geophysical exploration are permissible if conducted in accordance with seasonal stipulations. This type of information was added to assist proponents in project planning to avoid placing projects in these areas.

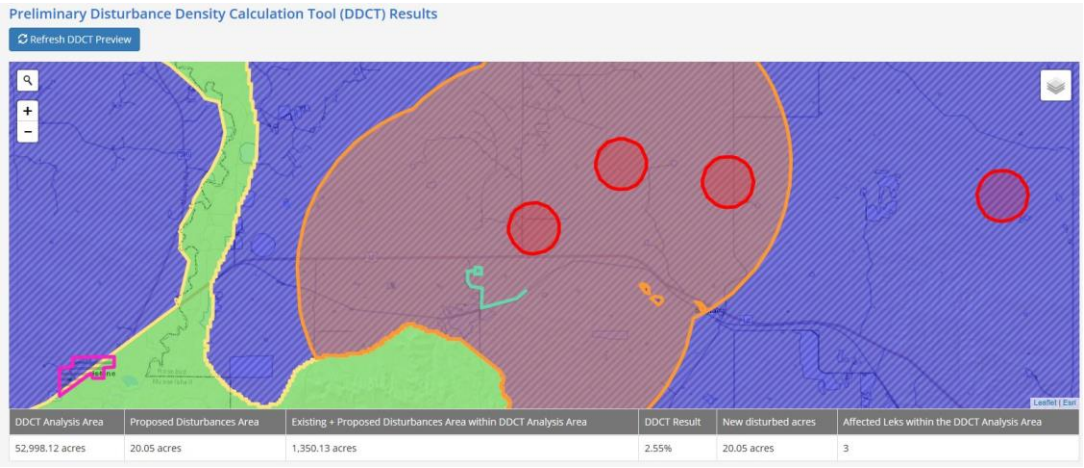
Uses and activities in Core Areas will be evaluated within the context of maximum allowable disturbance (disturbance percentages, location and number of disturbances) of suitable sage grouse habitat within the area affected by the project. Unsuitable habitat occurring within the project area will not be included in the disturbance cap calculations.

Existing disturbances shall be included. Waterbodies greater than 10 acres are considered as "unsuitable habitat" and removed from the DDCT calculation and DDCT analysis areas. If they are present in your analysis area, they will be visible on the map as highlighted polygons within the DDCT calculation area. To view lek No Surface Occupancy (NSO) information, zoom into the proposed project area, and the red circles will appear at a finer scale.

Surface disturbance will be limited to 5% of suitable sage grouse habitat averaged across the area affected by the project. Distribution of disturbance may be considered and approved on a case-by-case basis, with a goal of consolidating disturbance. Further details on DDCT analyses are provided in Section 6.0 Review and Submit.

The *preliminary* DDCT results include a table with calculations for disturbed acreages, newly disturbance acreages, and a percentage of disturbances within the proposed project area. The final DDCT results, which may be different form the preliminary results, will be included in your completed review documentation.

The following screenshot is an example of how the DDCT calculation map and results are displayed for your project.



4.0 Questionnaire

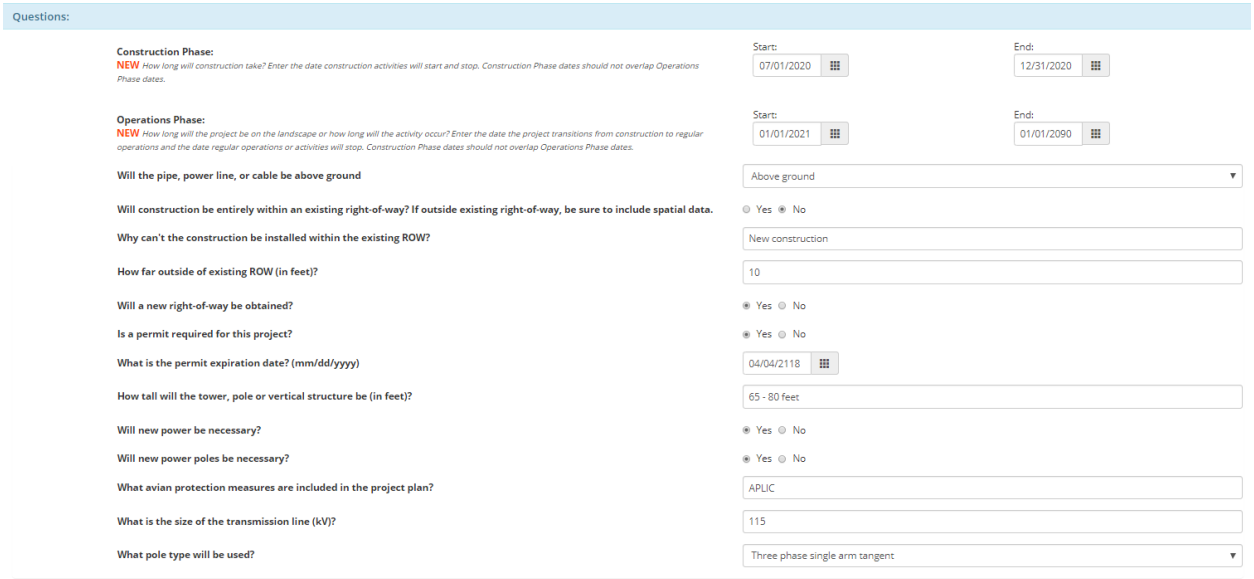
This section will ask you questions about each type of disturbances you entered in Section 3.0. Each disturbance table shows you the descriptive information you just entered, including the Type, Area, EO Habitat Classes, Location, Ownership and any notes you included.

It will also ask for beginning and ending dates for Construction, and for Operations. They are defined as follows:

- *Construction Phase:* How long will construction take? Enter the date construction activities will start and stop. Construction Phase dates should not overlap Operations Phase dates.
- *Operation Phase:* How long will the project be on the landscape or how long will the activity occur? Enter the date the project transitions from construction to regular operations or activities stop. Construction Phase dates should not overlap Operation Phase dates.

The questionnaire will then ask questions based on the Disturbance Type. There may also be questions regarding associated infrastructure, rights-of-way, contracting dates, whether certain features are new or being upgraded, and if power poles have been identified, what type of avian protections measures are going to be implemented.

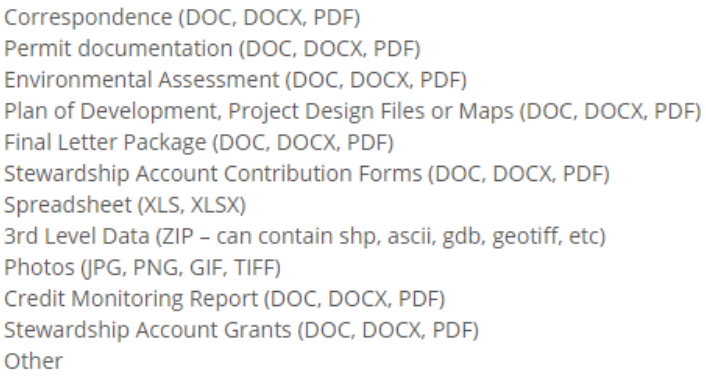
The following screenshot is an example of questions asked for a distribution power line.



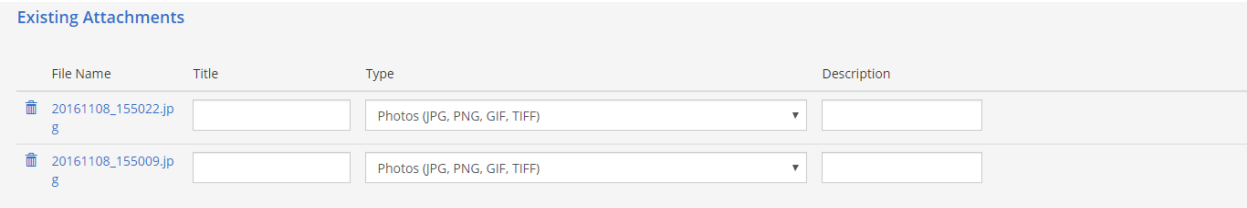
5.0 Attachments

This page allows you to browse your computer to upload relevant documents to your project record. These are also secure behind the state IT firewall so they cannot be seen by anyone other than the proponent and the Program, and they won't be disseminated. You

can upload individual file or batch upload multiple files of the same type. If you have multiple attachments to batch upload, first identify the files you wish to upload on your computer and highlighting the first file, then pressing and holding the control button, highlight and control/click each file you want to upload. Once all the files are selected, select type from the dropdown list (shown below) then click the Save button (at the bottom of the page).



The files will be displayed in a table. Type in a title and short description in the boxes on the table.

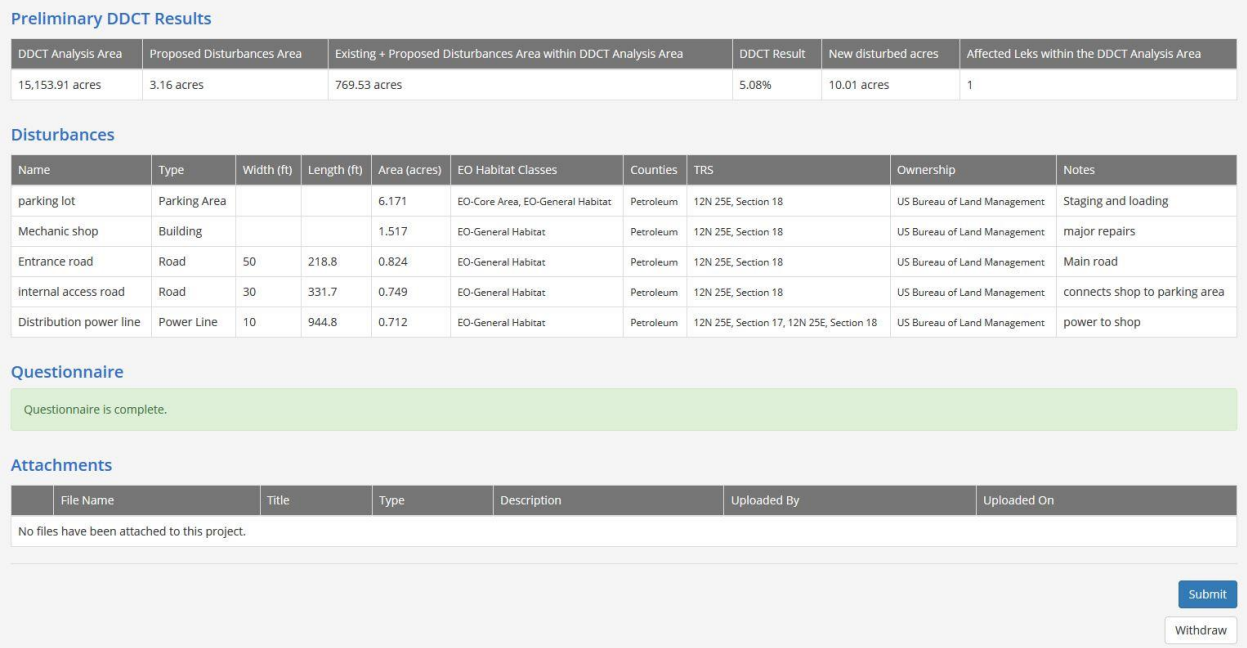


Once all files are uploaded click Save and Continue to move to the next page.

6.0 Review and Submit

Before submitting, please review your project to make sure you have an accurate map of your disturbances, a thorough description of the proposal, and identify all aspects of the project. Allow 45-60 days for Program review prior to submitting for an agency permit application. Allow more time for larger or more complicated projects to make sure the review can be completed within the overall project schedule. You may also decide to save your project and submit it at a later date. This can be done using the Save button, and it will be there when you return to the website. Or you may decide to Withdraw a project and can do so at any time. The project information will be stored on the website. To assist with your review prior to submitting, the website will summarize your project for you.

The information will look similar to this:



Preliminary DDCT Results

DDCT Analysis Area	Proposed Disturbances Area	Existing + Proposed Disturbances Area within DDCT Analysis Area	DDCT Result	New disturbed acres	Affected Leks within the DDCT Analysis Area
15,153.91 acres	3.16 acres	769.53 acres	5.08%	10.01 acres	1

Disturbances

Name	Type	Width (ft)	Length (ft)	Area (acres)	EO Habitat Classes	Counties	TRS	Ownership	Notes
parking lot	Parking Area			6.171	EO-Core Area, EO-General Habitat	Petroleum	12N 25E, Section 18	US Bureau of Land Management	Staging and loading
Mechanic shop	Building			1.517	EO-General Habitat	Petroleum	12N 25E, Section 18	US Bureau of Land Management	major repairs
Entrance road	Road	50	218.8	0.824	EO-General Habitat	Petroleum	12N 25E, Section 18	US Bureau of Land Management	Main road
internal access road	Road	30	331.7	0.749	EO-General Habitat	Petroleum	12N 25E, Section 18	US Bureau of Land Management	connects shop to parking area
Distribution power line	Power Line	10	944.8	0.712	EO-General Habitat	Petroleum	12N 25E, Section 17, 12N 25E, Section 18	US Bureau of Land Management	power to shop

Questionnaire

Questionnaire is complete.

Attachments

	File Name	Title	Type	Description	Uploaded By	Uploaded On
No files have been attached to this project.						

Submit

Withdraw

After submitting the information, proponents will receive an automated email response with a confirmation number verifying that the information was received by the Program. Each submission will be assigned a unique number. Program staff will determine whether the proposed activity would occur in a core area, general habitat, or a connectivity area. The Program may contact you to get more information or discuss the proposed activity.

If your submission has discrepancies, is lacking in critical information, or in some way is determined to be incomplete, the Program may return the project to you with instructions on how to provide the necessary information to complete the review. You will receive an automated email notifying you that your project has been returned, and what additional information is needed. Once the consultation process is completed, the Program will provide complete documentation to project proponents. You will always have access to your project at our website for future reference.

6.1 Confidentiality and Security

All information submitted to the Program is securely stored behind the DNRC firewall. It can only be viewed by the proponent who submitted the project through the ePass password protected entry into the site, and by Program reviewers.

6.2 Program Analysis

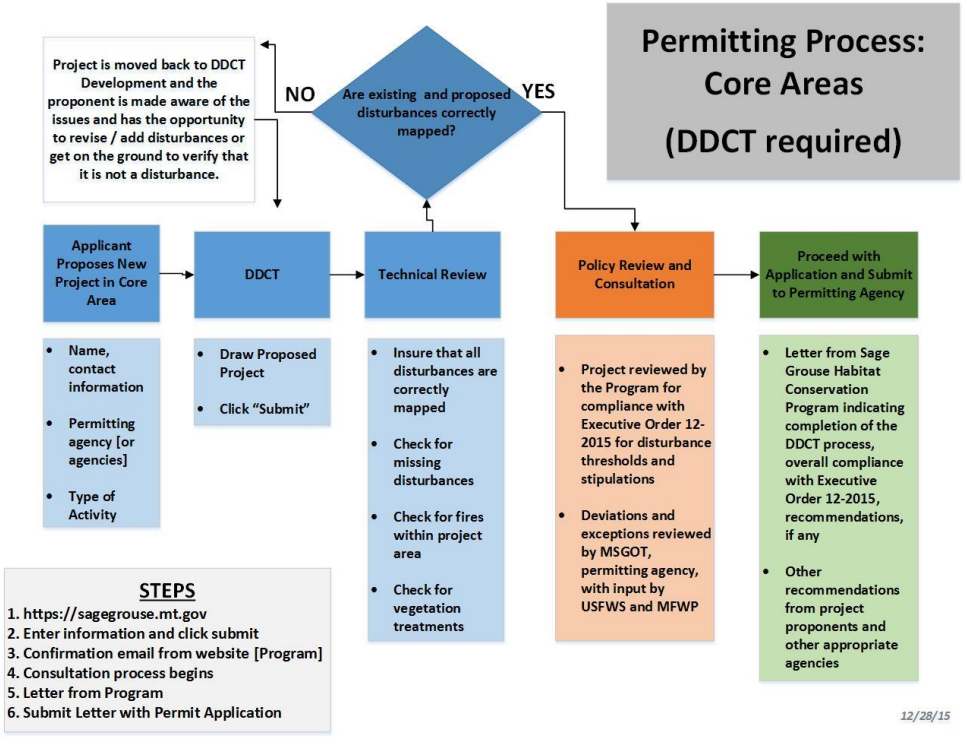
Montana's goal is to conserve greater sage grouse and key sagebrush habitats so that Montana will maintain authority to manage its own lands, wildlife, and economy. Implementing Montana's Conservation Strategy will ensure that listing under the federal Endangered Species Act will never be warranted.

The Executive Orders apply to all programs and activities of state government, including permitting, grant programs, and technical assistance. Through a consultation process, the Program will work with project proponents to first avoid impacts, minimize impacts, and restore impacted areas. The Program may require compensatory mitigation for impacts that can't be avoided, minimized or restored.

If the project is in sage grouse habitat designated as a core area, general habitat, or a connectivity area, the Program will review the proposed activity to determine whether it complies with the stipulations, conditions, and recommended practices outlined in Executive Order 12-2015.

Core Areas

If the activity would take place in a core area, the Program will calculate the density and disturbance levels within the project area using the Density Disturbance Calculation Tool (DDCT). The results will be compared to allowable thresholds set forth in Executive Order 12-2015. The Program will also determine whether the project complies with other components of Executive Order 12-2015.

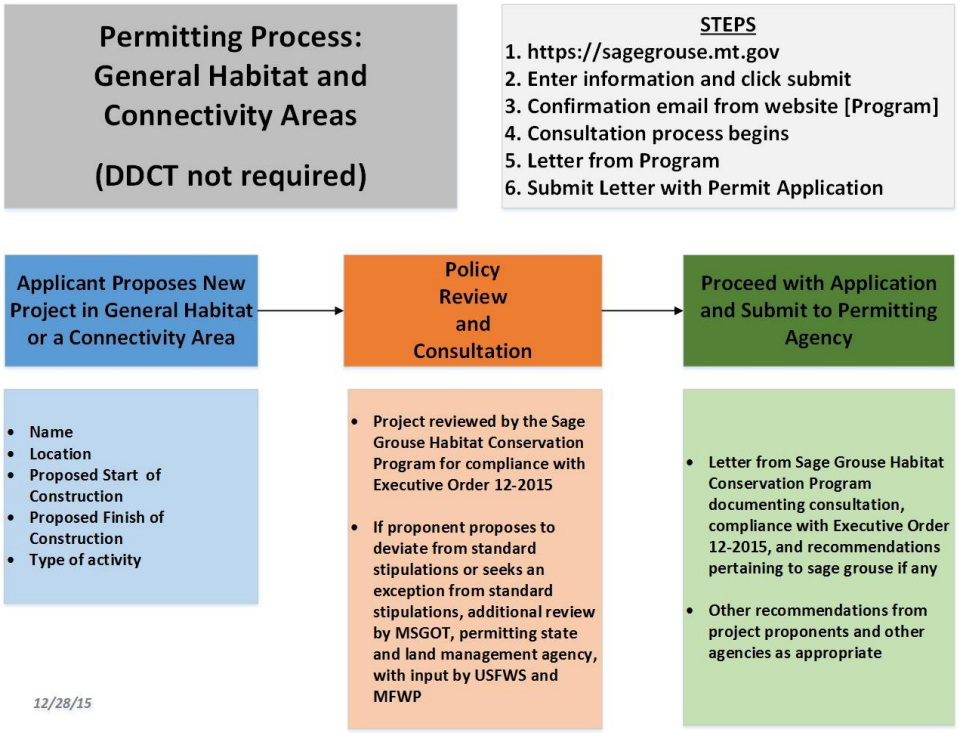


General Habitat

The health of General Habitat areas is a critical element in the effort to maintain the abundance and distribution of sage grouse in Montana. Development scenarios in General Habitat are more flexible than in Core Areas but should still be designed and managed to maintain populations, habitats, and essential migration routes, since this Conservation Strategy requires habitat connectivity and movement between populations in Core Areas. There are no specific surface disturbance limits in General Habitat. However, as a standard management practice surface disturbance should be minimized, through measures such as co-locating new and existing structures. Structures and associated infrastructure could be removed, and those areas reclaimed.

Connectivity Areas

Connectivity habitat includes those areas that provide important linkages among populations of sage grouse, particularly between Core Areas or priority populations in adjacent states and across international borders. At this time only one sage grouse connectivity area has been identified (Montana-Saskatchewan Connectivity Area in Valley County). Research continues, based on genetic characteristics of subpopulations, to better define the composition of other possible priority Connectivity Areas. MSGOT is studying the stipulations that are necessary in Connectivity areas to prevent a decline in sage grouse populations. In the interim, the Valley County Connectivity area shall be subject to the stipulations for General Habitat.



7.0 What Happens after My Project is Submitted

When the consultation process is complete, the Program will provide a letter with supporting documentation, if required, to be included with the application submitted to the permitting agency. Your entire project, along with supporting documentation attached during the submission process, will remain on the website and can be accessed by the proponent at any time.

8.0 Glossary

BLM priority areas – The BLM has identified areas as having the highest value to maintaining the species and its habitat. These areas are classified as Priority Habitat Management Areas (PHMA), General Habitat Management Areas (GHMA), and Restoration Habitat Management Areas (RHMA). Land use measures in Priority Habitat are designed to minimize or avoid habitat disturbance.

Connectivity area - Connectivity habitat includes those areas that provide important linkages among populations of sage grouse, particularly between Core Areas or priority populations in adjacent states and across international borders.

Core area – High quality designated habitat that captures approximately76 percent of the displaying males in Montana.

DDCT – Density Disturbance Calculation Tool

DDCT analysis area – The four-mile buffer area surrounding a proposed project footprint that is analyzed by the DDCT.

Disturbance type – Activities associated with each project type that create surface disturbance.

Due Diligence – The project review phase of Program consultation for proposed projects.

EO – Executive Orders 12-2015 and 21-2015

Exempt Community Boundary - A geographically-limited exception to the consultation requirements and stipulations for any activity that would wholly occur within the boundaries of incorporated cities and towns as of March 28, 2016, consistent with the most recent available data. Cities and towns do not provide sagebrush habitat for sage grouse – the land has already been converted to human-related land uses. Loss of habitat and surface disturbance and human activity levels already exceed tolerance thresholds for sage grouse.

Existing disturbance – Existing surface disturbance as mapped for a given year. This map layer is used to inform the DDCT calculations for a proposed project area.

General habitat – Suitable habitat containing sage grouse that is designed and managed to maintain populations, habitats, and essential migration routes to meet the Conservation Strategy requirement for maintaining habitat connectivity and movement between populations in Core Areas.

Habitat Class – Core, General, Connectivity

NSO – No Surface Occupancy

Permanent – As defined by the Program, this refers to the duration of impacts from any disturbance type that will be on the landscape for 25 years or more.

PLSS – Public Land Survey System which uses the Township, Range and Section grid system to describe a location in the state.

Polygon – A computer map drawing tool used to create dimensional features of a project, such as a building.

Polyline – A computer map drawing tool used to create linear features of a project, such as a road.

Project type – The primary description of the type of infrastructure project being proposed.

Proponent – A person or entity that submits a proposed project for review by the Program.

Reclamation - Reclamation should re-establish native grasses, forbs, and shrubs during interim and final reclamation. The goal of reclamation is to achieve cover, species composition, and life form diversity commensurate with the surrounding plant community or desired ecological condition to benefit sage grouse and replace or enhance sage grouse habitat to the degree that environmental conditions allow. Landowners should be consulted on the desired plant mix on private lands. The operator is required to control noxious and invasive plant species, including cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) and Japanese brome (*Bromus japonicus*).

Stipulations – Conditions for proposed projects recommended by the Program that are necessary to prevent a decline in sage grouse populations.

Spatial data – The spatial dimensions of a proposed project that are used to create a map of the project location and size on the landscape.

Surface Disturbance – includes any conversion of formerly suitable habitat to grasslands, croplands, mining, well pads, roads, or other physical disturbance that renders the habitat unusable for sage grouse caused by proposed activities submitted to the Program for review.

Unsuitable Habitat – is land within the historic range of sage grouse that did not, does not, nor will not provide sage grouse habitat due to natural ecological conditions such as badlands or canyons.

USFS – Greater sage grouse (GRSG) priority habitat layers

Withdrawn – An action taken to remove a proposed project from the review process.